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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001603

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING  
SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE  
STATE PLEASE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [Z1](#) [ZANU](#) [PF](#) [MDC](#)  
SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE,S NOVEMBER 26 SENATE ELECTIONS:  
PSEUDO-RACE ECLIPSED BY MDC DIVIDE

REF: A. REF A: HARARE 001578  
[1](#)B. REF B: HARARE 001467  
[1](#)C. REF C: HARARE 001238

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1  
.4 b/d

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) November 26 marks election day for the newly-recreated Senate. Few observers expect the institution to produce much beyond 66 new offices to be handed out by the government as patronage. Given voter apathy, the calls for a boycott from MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai, and lackluster ZANU-PF campaigning, we expect that few Zimbabweans will bother to turn out on Saturday, likely resulting in a hollow victory for ZANU-PF. The Senate elections have, however, exposed festering leadership divisions within the MDC (reftels) that will not go away after November 26. The Embassy intends to mount a small-scale monitoring effort, focused on Harare and Bulawayo, in conjunction with several other western Embassies and we recommend that the Department issue a press statement criticizing the elections as well as the creation of the Senate. End Summary.

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A Powerless Institution  
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[1](#)2. (C) ZANU-PF in August used its parliamentary majority to pass the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (17) Bill, which among other measures reintroduced a 66-member Senate (ref C). MDC head Tsvangirai, backed by most of his party and virtually all of Zimbabwe,s civil society, roundly criticized the Senate as powerless but expensive institution that was created solely to enlarge GOZ,s opportunities for patronage. The Senate has no power of veto and can only delay for a few months the passage of legislation approved by the lower house. Further reflecting this body,s insignificance, the Senate will be done away with after five years.

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A Sham Election  
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[1](#)3. (C) Confirming its intention to use the Senate as a patronage tool, the ruling party put forward a list political pensioners, many of whom are members of the old guard who lost in past elections, to contest the 50 elected seats (ref B). (N.B. ZANU-PF was the only party to nominate candidates in 19 seats, winning those slots unopposed; 16 additional seats are appointed by the President.) The GOZ appears also to have gerrymandered several Senatorial districts in order to make inroads into MDC strongholds. An electoral analysis (e-mailed to AF/S) by the nonpartisan Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) found evidence of this in most provinces.

[1](#)4. (C) MDC President Tsvangirai called for a boycott of the election but was opposed by a group of largely Ndebele party leaders led by party Vice President Gibson Sibanda and Secretary General Welshman Ncube (reftels). 26 MDC

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&candidates8 filed to compete in the elections. Over the past month, even as Tsvangirai,s boycott campaign emerged victorious among the party,s rank and file members, the intra-party dispute heated up. As popular support for participation eroded even in Matabelerland, the pro-participation camp shifted its message to one against Tsvangirai,s supposed transgressions of the party

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constitution and anti-democratic tendencies.

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Electorate Tuning Out  
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15. (C) The usual fanfare that has proceeded past elections in Zimbabwe is conspicuously absent. The cities are largely devoid of posters and the state media has reported only a handful of rallies by ZANU-PF candidates. The majority of voters seem apathetic about these elections and therefore all the more likely to heed Tsvangirai's call for a boycott. The result is therefore likely to be a sweeping, but hollow, ZANU-PF victory. That said, and despite the low turnout, it is possible that some of the MDC8 candidates could win, especially in opposition strongholds of Matabeleland South and North, where, as one participation-minded MDC MP told poloff, the electorate instinctively votes against the government come election time. It is also possible that ZANU-PF, sensing an opportunity to further divide the opposition, may allow some of them to win seats.

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Next Steps for the MDC  
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16. (C) The intra-MDC debate over participation in the Senate election has highlighted long-standing divisions within the MDC leadership and has threatened to split the main opposition party. The fates of the 26 candidates come ballot day, however, are likely only to move the opposition into a new phase of intra-party competition, not to conclude it. Reflecting conventional wisdom here, former MDC mediator Brian Raftopolous told the Charge on November 23 that "divorce" seemed likely, but Ncube's faction might survive initially as a regional MDC rump that would be able to reassess its options ) including reconciliation -- in the run-up to and in the wake of next year's Party Congress. That said, the challenge for Tsvangirai and the wider opposition remains to prove their continued relevance to a population that has been shell-shocked by economic decline and government repression.

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Observation Efforts  
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17. (C) The Charge has been meeting regularly with other like-minded Chiefs of Mission to discuss election coverage. Commensurate with the election's relative insignificance, the international community is mounting only a limited observation campaign. Post will send one accredited officer and staff to observe the Gutu North parliamentary by-election ) a seat that ZANU-PF is likely to retain because of a weak MDC candidate and the rural area's traditional allegiance to the ruling party. Two unaccredited officers, accompanied by an Australian diplomat and staff will be surveying Bulawayo, where there is the most potential for election day violence. Two unaccredited officers and staff will monitor events in Harare. The Japanese mission indicated it might also have one officer join us in observing Harare. The British mission will be mounting an observation effort similar to ours.

18. (C) According to SADC member diplomats here, SADC organs are sitting this election out and the issue of SADC electoral guidelines, a prominent feature of the March parliamentary elections have been notable for their absence this time around. Counterparts at the South African and Namibian Embassies told us November 21 that some of their Harare-based diplomats would observe. According to a contact at the Japanese Embassy, the Chinese Ambassador to Harare reported that Beijing requested that the GOZ not invite China to observe. For its part, the domestic monitoring organization ZESN has denounced the elections as a fraud and will field only ten observer teams, canvassing Gutu North, Harare, and eight races in Matabeleland.

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Statements  
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19. (C) At the last meeting of like-minded Chiefs of Mission, the Australian and British Ambassadors indicated that their governments were likely to issue statements condemning the elections. The EU representatives were split. Post recommends that Washington also issue a statement along the following lines:

-- Zimbabwe's Senate elections did not advance the cause of democracy in Zimbabwe.

-- The electoral climate in Zimbabwe is still dramatically tilted in favor of the ruling ZANU-PF party. There have been no reforms made since the fraudulent March parliamentary elections.

-- Many of the seats were uncontested and President Mugabe appointed still others. As a result, ZANU-PF had won a majority in the Senate before the election was ever held.

-- The political opposition opposed the creation of the

Senate as an exercise in government patronage rather than an exercise of the popular will.

-- The (expected/apparent) low turn-out further undermines the legitimacy of the Senate.

-- Zimbabwe's multi-faceted crises demand not an expensive new political institution but restored rule of law, responsible economic policies, and genuine political dialogue between the major parties and civil society.

-- We urge the Government of Zimbabwe once again to establish a political and economic framework that can restore the country's prosperity and hope.

SCHULTZ